

## high school reunion (mileven week) by urdearestmom

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**Summary:** With a tired sigh, a fleeting what am I doing here flies through her mind before she leans over and shakes her husband by the shoulder. He snorts awake. "Hmm- what?" "We're here."

## high school reunion (mileven week)

mileven week day 3! today's prompt was HIGH SCHOOL REUNION.

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The last time they visited was at Christmas, but that had been to see family, not high school classmates.

Mike's asleep in the passenger seat after having stayed up way past his self-imposed bedtime last night trying to finish a section of his new manuscript. El's driving. They're on the interstate somewhere close to their hometown, and her brain constantly wanders from who she might see tonight to what her kids are up to to *what did we have for dinner yesterday? Do we have leftovers?*

Admittedly, it had been a little hard to leave the kids back at home, especially Vienna who is only four, but El knows that they're safe and sound with the dos Santos. They have two daughters of their own who they're doing a fine job with if what El knows of her son's best friend is any indication. Anyhow, they're only about two hours away, so if, God forbid, anything happens, they're close enough to go home.

Mike had found the invitation in the mail almost a year ago and had been following the event on the Facebook page someone had made for it. This is the twenty-year reunion of Hawkins High class of '89. It's the first one they're going to, actually, since El was pregnant at the time of the tenth and the fifteenth and they'd decided not to attend those. It'll be the first time in twenty years that she's seeing some of these people. Others she's seen around Hawkins during visits, people who never left or people who left and came back.

Driving through the town isn't weird in itself, but she rarely passes by the high school when she does and now she's going there on purpose. The lot in front of the school is only about half-full and the spot she miraculously somehow remembers as being the one Mike always parked in during senior year is empty, so she pulls into it and kills the engine. Hawkins High glares menacingly at her from across the way, replaying memories of cruel taunting through all four years. Some of these people El hasn't seen in twenty years, but she could go the rest of her life too.

With a tired sigh, a fleeting *what am I doing here* flies through her mind before she leans over and shakes her husband by the shoulder.

He snorts awake. "Hmm- what?"

"We're here."

Mike sits up slowly and then pulls the seat up with him, and El can see the trepidation building in his face. They're on the same page, as usual. He shivers.

"Do we have to go in?"

El nods wearily. "We came all the way here for a reason, we're not backing out now."

She hears Mike gulp. "Right. We're just gonna see some people and have some drinks. Maybe get some food before we head over to my mom's. It'll be fine."

Mike doesn't sound very sure of himself, but he gets out of the car anyway so El follows. She grips his hand tightly as they make their way inside the school.

The thing about this particular reunion is that out of their close friend group, the only other person coming is Lucas. Will went to the ten-year reunion and decided that was enough for him, Dustin and his wife are busy celebrating their fifteenth anniversary, and unfortunately, Max's dad is sick so she's staying in California to take care of him.

El's starting to get that prickly uncomfortable feeling she used to get back when she first started high school. She hates it. It crops up every now and then when she's forced into a situation where she doesn't know what to expect, but she's gotten much better at ignoring it and pushing through over the years. Having Mike with her always helps.

Upon entering the gym and seeing people she hasn't even spared a thought about in years, El feels this weird sensation of being thrown back in time but all the same, *not*. It's like, she's seeing people as they are right now, but she's also seeing them as they were when she knew them. And while it's not the strangest thing to ever happen to her, it's

unsettling.

Mike comes to a screeching halt next to her, bringing her to a stop as well. "Is that *Troy*?"

He's staring across the room at someone standing next to the drink table, and El follows his gaze to see a man who looks like an adult version of her husband's childhood tormentor. God, that's weird. Troy was always one of those people who seemed like he would never grow up, never mature. But there he is.

El's eyes sweep around the room looking for Lucas, but she sees that he isn't here yet. Instead, her vision lands on two women who are standing together that she hasn't thought about in a long time: Angie Minnella and Kim McGuire. Their last names are probably different now, but that's who she knew them as. And they had been her friends. Of course, El was never as close with them as she was with the Party, who are her family and know things about her that no one else is allowed to know, but Angie and Kim were nice to hang out with. El liked having days where she could pretend she was a normal teenager, and those two girls made it easy.

"Hey," she says, letting go of Mike's hand, "I'm going to go talk to Angie and Kim. Will you be okay by yourself?"

Mike nods distractedly, still staring dumbfoundedly at Troy and the other guys around him. El shakes her head as she walks away. He'll get over it.

Angie and Kim are idly chatting as she walks up to them, but Kim sees El coming and her eyes widen as her mouth drops open.

"Oh my *god*! El?!"

Angie whips around and pauses uncertainly. "Is that you, El Hopper?"

El grins, the prickly feeling gone instantly. It's refreshing to hear herself referred to by her first full name. "It's me!"

Angie reaches over and hugs her tightly, pulling away with a wide grin as she lets Kim move in.

"We haven't seen you in so long!" Kim exclaims. "You didn't come to the last two reunions, right?"

El shakes her head. "No, I was pregnant both times so we decided not to come."

Angie gasps. "You look great! What do you *mean* you've been pregnant twice?!"

At this, El laughs lightly. She doesn't look *that* great, nothing compared to how she used to in her teenage years, but she takes the compliment. "Well, what have you two been up to?"

Angie works as a theatre professor at Tisch, and has an eight-year-old son with her husband of ten years. Kim didn't go to college, but moved to England for a while after high school before coming back to the States and settling in Chicago. She co-owns a restaurant there with her younger brother and lives a happily single life. They both seem really happy and El's glad that they've been able to be. God only knows that her own road to happiness has been anything but simple.

"So," says Kim conversationally. "I just saw Mike Wheeler by the drink table, and I happen to remember that he was a certain someone's doting boyfriend the last time we saw her. Care to tell us what happened in that department?"

El's fairly sure they know what happened, she and Mike weren't voted most likely to get married within five years for no reason. She giggles. "Married for almost sixteen years," she answers, holding up her left hand.

Angie practically screeches. El remembers her having high expectations for the relationship back when they were in high school, always staunchly believing that Mike and El would get married and live happily ever after, so El's sure that Angie is over the moon at seeing that twenty years later her belief holds true.

Kim sighs exaggeratedly. "The dreamy romance of a lifetime," she says airily, and El is reminded of why she was such good friends with these two in the first place.

A few minutes later, after El explains both what she and Mike do for a living, Mike himself appears at her side. He looks deeply confused.

"Sorry to interrupt, ladies," he says, then he turns specifically to El. "He's a lawyer, El. Can you believe that? A *lawyer*. What the *fuck*?" He whispers the last word, but it's surprising. Mike doesn't use the f-word anymore, not when they're raising two impressionable young children, so it's a testament to how mind-boggled he is that he even says it.

To be fair, El's also having a rough time wrapping her head around the fact that the school bully is now a lawyer. It's totally unexpected.

Afterward, Mike stays with her until he sees someone else he wants to talk to. He leaves with a light parting kiss, at which Angie sighs.

"Storybook romance," she says. "I always hoped you two would stay together. You had the sweetest, most genuine relationship I've ever seen in high schoolers."

El smiles. "Thanks, I guess."

Kim laughs. "Angie's forgetting to tell you the part where she was jealous the whole time you guys dated."

El frowns. "Why were you jealous?"

Angie brushes a piece of hair behind her ear as her face colours a little. "I'm thirty-eight years old, I shouldn't be embarrassed about this, but, well... it is what it is."

Kim elbows her. "Are you gonna spill, or what?"

Angie throws a glare Kim's way and El is reminded of the many sleepovers they had, Max included, but Max is all the way in California right now.

"Ugh, okay, I'll tell." Angie looks at El for a second, then smiles. "I had the *biggest* crush on Hawkins Middle's president nerd. When we were eleven, I sat next to him in English and he was just... a really sweet kid. I didn't stop liking him until we were sixteen, and by that time you had already come into the picture and we were friends. At first, I

hated you, because you were dating the boy I liked," Angie laughs.

El's eyebrows have almost disappeared into her hairline. This is all new information. Who knew?

"And then I realized I was being ridiculous," Angie continues. "It wasn't your fault he liked you and not me, and you were a really great friend. So I made myself get over it, and I did. After that, it was just kind of being jealous of the type of relationship you had, because I wanted something like that."

Kim is grinning as if this is the best moment of her life. Granted, finally spilling a secret after almost thirty years must be pretty satisfying. "And that's the story of how Angie wanted to steal your boyfriend, El."

Angie smacks Kim's arm in horror. "I did *not*!"

There's a second where none of them says anything, and then all three burst out laughing. Who knew rekindling friendships could be so fun?

Lucas arrives about half an hour after he was supposed to, looking stressed about being late. El knows he hates being late, so she understands. She's heading down the hall to the restroom when she sees him barreling her way. He almost disappears past her but stops when she greets him.

"El!" He exclaims in surprise. "Didn't even see you there. Where's Mike?"

"He's in the gym somewhere, I think he said he was talking to someone from debate club?" She answers, unsure.

Lucas shrugs. "I'll find him. It's great to see you, though."

El rolls her eyes. "You saw me at Christmas."

Lucas rolls his eyes right back. "Yeah, and? I'm not allowed to miss you?"

"Oh, come here." El envelops her friend in a tight hug. It *has* been a

while since Christmas.

Lucas then makes his way to the gym as El proceeds to the restroom. Inside, she stumbles across none other than Stacey Whose-Last-Name-She-Can't-Remember. She utters a quick hi and locks herself in a stall.

Looking at the woman throws El back to the days when she had to endure changing before and after gym class without friends. There was a group of girls, led by Stacey, who used to call her names. They'd tell her she was ugly and undeserving of friends and that she was never going to find a guy with her looks. At the time, El had been small and skinny, still in the process of outgrowing twelve years of maltreatment. Even now that she's an adult woman with a lot more confidence than she ever thought she'd possess, seeing Stacey makes her feel small and worthless again.

El does her business and resolves to leave as quickly as she can, hopefully without confrontation. She's quietly lathering her hands with soap when Stacey turns away from the mirror and says, "You've gained weight."

El sees red. Even after twenty years- "Yeah, I have two kids and a husband who cooks for me every night. What about it?" She retorts coldly. She refuses to look at Stacey, she absolutely *will not*-

"I didn't mean it like that," Stacey responds. "You used to be really skinny, that's all. You look good."

El doesn't say anything as she washes the soap off her hands, not sure how to respond. "Thanks, I guess," she says after a moment.

"No problem," Stacey answers, and she turns back to the mirror.

El leaves the restroom feeling thoroughly confused. Was that Stacey's form of apology for the misery she'd put El through in high school? El doesn't know how she feels about it.

When she gets back to the gym, she gets Angie and Kim's phone numbers and resolves to stay in contact with them. It'll be nice to talk to them every now and again. She's had a lot of fun with them tonight. El finds Mike standing with Lucas in a corner and joins their



conversation, but the three of them leave sometime around forty-five minutes later. Lucas is staying with his parents for the weekend while Mike and El are heading back to Indianapolis tomorrow, but the trio are going in the same direction for now.

It's just like high school, Lucas heading into his house waving goodbye to Mike and El as they enter the Wheelers' basement, only they've got twenty years separating tonight from all the other days they did this.

Mike's dad is asleep, as usual, but his mom is awake at the dining table, looking over photo albums. Mike groans when he sees her.

"*Mom*, is that necessary?"

Karen looks up at the couple in the doorway and smiles. "Since you're back for a reunion I figured I'd get nostalgic too. It's what I do in my spare time. All of my babies moved away."

And then El gets roped into looking at pictures of a baby Mike while his thirty-eight-year-old counterpart goes upstairs to change out of his nice clothes. She's seen all these pictures a thousand times in the twenty-six years she's known Mike, but they're cuter every time. She can really see a resemblance between pictures of Mike as a toddler and what their daughter looks like now.

Eventually, Karen gets tired of looking at the photos and decides to go to bed, so El follows her mother-in-law's prerogative and makes her way upstairs. She grabs her toothbrush and brushes her teeth before going back into Mike's old room. Again, it's funny how like high school this is, now that she's thinking about it. Mike's room holds a lot of memories for them. It's where she snuck out to a hundred times, it's where he first told her he loved her, it's where they were first intimate with each other... this room is special.

But nothing's more special about it than the man she shares the memories with, who is lying face down on the comforter, shirtless as usual when he goes to bed. El changes into her nightgown before turning off the light and slipping onto the bed next to him.

"I know you're not asleep."

Mike grunts.

"What did you think of tonight? I had fun."

He turns his head to face her. "It was fine, I got to talk to some people I haven't seen in forever. But I'm also still mind-blown that Troy is a lawyer. Like, I don't even- *out of all people*."

El hums in agreement. "Yeah, that's weird. I ran into Stacey in the restroom."

"What'd she say?"

"She said I looked good."

El's face warms up as her husband gives her *the look*. They both know what that look means.

"You always look good," he says huskily, his tongue darting out against his own lips. He reaches out for her and moves so that he hovers above her, his hands pushing her nightgown up her thighs.

"We'll have to be quiet," she whispers. "Your parents are asleep."

In the weak moonlight coming through the window, Mike's teeth flash as he grins. "We perfected this in high school, didn't we? I can be quiet."

El sighs. Having young kids means they haven't been able to do this for a while, so she kind of wants it really badly, and the feeling once again reminds her of high school. After the first time, she wanted it all the time, which was kind of complicated, but they managed. She thinks they can manage again.

"*Can* you?"

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El wakes up in the middle of the night, dripping with sweat. She just had a really weird dream and she can't remember any of it, only that it felt really weird. She has to take a moment to remind herself of where she is. The ceiling is plain, so she could be anywhere, but she can easily identify the sleeping person next to her as Mike. So that

means that she either snuck into his room last night or he snuck into hers.

Looking around, El sees a window on her right and a bookshelf crammed with books and other miscellaneous objects next to it. It's got medals hanging off the sides. Okay, so she's in Mike's room.

After identifying her surroundings, El's racing heartbeat is almost back to normal and she lies down again. *Everything is okay*, she reassures herself, but she grabs Mike's arm and lays it over her waist, snuggling closer to him as comfort.

She's probably just stressed about tomorrow, that's all. It's graduation day, and after that, it's the Party's last summer in Hawkins before they part ways for college. It's strange how quickly high school ended, while when they first started it felt like it would *never* end. But it did. High school's over. El's kind of glad to have it behind her. There were a lot of things about it that sucked, but maybe in twenty years she'll think about it and it won't have been so bad.

Maybe.

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lmfao fuckin pLOT TWIST!

can el see the future? stay tuned for the next installment in mileven week!